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Ruth Hardy, Chair
Senate Committee on Government Operations

Dear Ruth:

Thank you for the opportunity to testify on behalf of the residents of Waterbury and the Town Selectboard. I wanted to focus my input on the specific question asked in regards to the state government response to the flood.

When the flood waters rose the state was responsive to Town needs. Our experienced and capable public works director recognized our sewer plant would be overwhelmed, and he requested the state complex in Waterbury be temporarily closed. That request included moving the emergency operations center, and it was indeed accommodated. We also reached out to emergency operations for assistance with securing some minor flood related supplies, and they were able to assist with procurement.

My short summary of our interaction with the state is this: state staff and individuals in leadership positions were available to assist Waterbury, but only if the Town made a request for help. Note this is not a criticism as we recognized that other areas of Vermont faced far greater challenges than Waterbury.

Some examples of where I believe interaction can be improved are as follows:

- Waterbury, through a cadre of dedicated volunteers, created its own 211 system. Myself and several others on our emergency management team did receive emails that contained useful data from the Vermont 211 system, but there was no notice and they were not flagged in any special manner. We admittedly lost track of one email from 211 due to this. It would be useful if 211 emails are followed with phone calls to ensure this does not occur in the future. We were fortunate in that our home-built system overlapped with 211, and we did not have individuals or families in need of services that were ignored. But this strikes me as a risk that can and should be mitigated.
- The state does not have any form of town or regional liaisons. We faced numerous questions from Waterbury residents and volunteers who were expecting some form of direct state response to the flooding, and I believe the presence of a liaison from the state during and/or immediately following the natural disaster would have been of assistance to the Town. As a new manager with several selectboard members who are similarly new, navigating the array of state agencies and contacts was difficult. Some "boots on the ground" assistance would have been helpful, and a state presence would have been greatly appreciated by our residents, staff and volunteers.

- The Town did not utilize the Vermont Alert system (see the note above about a new manager and selectboard). Generally speaking, we were focused on other means of communicating to our residents, and most of our meetings featured local press and were followed-up with social media and radio broadcasts. Nonetheless, during an emergency there cannot be too many forms of communication. My suggestion is simple. Every City and Town in Vermont, to my knowledge, is required to submit, on an annual basis, an emergency management plan to the state. It would be useful if the state automatically enrolled local emergency management leaders in the Vermont Alert system, and provided some basic training, so we had the ability to submit notices to the system.
- Our conversations with state officials were generally focused on municipal infrastructure and needs, which was indeed helpful. However, our infrastructure fared well during the flood; our challenge was in ameliorating community needs. Again, this role was led by local volunteers without direct state assistance.
- Since the flood the Town has struggled to navigate the array of funding opportunities to assist us with preparing for the next flood. Again, the staff we have interacted with have been fantastic, but some form of state assistance to help all towns navigate these issues would have been effective.

Thank you again for your time and all that you do for Vermonters.

Sincerely Yours,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Tom Leitz", with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Tom Leitz
Waterbury Town Manager